

Sussex Research Online

What's in a name: the politics of queer on campus

Article (Published Version)

O'Riordan, Kate and Webb, Sharon (2020) What's in a name: the politics of queer on campus. *Sexualities*. pp. 1-20. ISSN 1363-4607

This version is available from Sussex Research Online: <http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/92672/>

This document is made available in accordance with publisher policies and may differ from the published version or from the version of record. If you wish to cite this item you are advised to consult the publisher's version. Please see the URL above for details on accessing the published version.

Copyright and reuse:

Sussex Research Online is a digital repository of the research output of the University.

Copyright and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. To the extent reasonable and practicable, the material made available in SRO has been checked for eligibility before being made available.

Copies of full text items generally can be reproduced, displayed or performed and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

What's in a name: The politics of queer on campus

Sexualities

0(0) 1–20

© The Author(s) 2020



Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/1363460720947306

journals.sagepub.com/home/sex**Kate O'Riordan and Sharon Webb** 

University of Sussex, UK

Abstract

This paper draws upon oral history interviews and archival work carried out to examine the history of the LGBTQ+ student society at the University of Sussex. It reflects upon the significance of the Society's name change over time (from GaySoc in the 1970s to its contemporary formation as the LGBTQ+ Society) and considers the role of the Society and its members as an active political and sociable group, concerned with a broad range of political and social justice movements, both on campus and across wider society, locally and nationally. It demonstrates how the experience of student societies relates to individual and group identity and how they help shape national and international politics. It looks at how the groups were positioned as political through their location and in relation to activism beyond LGBTQ+ issues and the University.

Keywords

Oral history, student politics, queer politics, activism, Brighton (UK)

Introduction

Politics across queer communities in the UK have undergone significant changes since the Sexual Offences Act of 1967 partially decriminalised homosexuality. Since then debate, protest and activism have included issues such as the age of consent, gay liberation, the AIDS crisis, marriage equality, and trans inclusion, to name but a few. Acronyms such as LGBTQ+, used to identify and create communities, have changed in relation to political and societal developments.

Corresponding author:

Sharon Webb, School of History, Art History & Philosophy, University of Sussex, Brighton, UK.

Email: sharon.webb@sussex.ac.uk

The pursuit of inclusive language, in these acronyms, however, hides significant ruptures in these communities. These ruptures are often represented as generational differences but this framing can obscure ongoing political frictions which emerge over time. This paper draws upon oral history interviews and archival work carried out to examine the history of the student LGBTQ+ Society at the University of Sussex (UK) (referred to as Sussex or the University interchangeably). It reflects upon the significance of the Society's name change over time (from GaySoc in the 1970s to its contemporary formation as the LGBTQ+ Society) and considers the role of the Society and its members as an active political and sociable group, concerned with a broad range of political and social justice movements, both on campus and across wider society. It considers the relationship between life on campus and other spaces in the City of Brighton and Hove (Brighton) and explores how town and gown are interwoven.

The research that underpins this paper is an attempt to capture some of the fragmented, and often incoherent, histories of the student LGBTQ+ Society at Sussex (the Society). The majority of primary source materials are oral history interviews with past and present members of the Society. These oral histories were prompted by the outcome of an event organised by the University's LGBTQ+ Society in 2017. The event call announced a 'Generations Panel to bring together discussion and experiences across generations within our community' (Sussexstudent.com, 2017). The ensuing panel brought together two older speakers and two students which in effect created and defined two generations. This configuration reinforced something of a divide in the panel, between people with experiences and lived memory that extended back to the mid to late 20th century, and those with experience of contemporary 21st century politics. Use of language emerged during the discussion as a tension around older experiences, formations and history on the one hand, and young people's experience of the contemporary moment on the other. A direct result of this discussion was the development of a research project to look into the Society's history. Two students, Gracy Zhang Tong and Saskia Dolan-Parry, worked with the University Student Union and an academic lead, to carry out interviews, and identify relevant media materials. They identified key events, demonstrations, exhibitions and controversies including: actions against British Home Stores (1976); the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE) (1979); protests against Section 28 (1988); engagements with Pride; alliances and antagonisms around the inclusion of L, B, T, Q and +; and controversies over the words dyke and faggot. The project assembled material over a timeline from 1970 to 2017 and involved 16 oral history interviews.

The work is also informed by queer archival projects in Brighton since the 1980s. The first of these was the Brighton Ourstory Project (1989–2013), which produced a powerful oral history of the 1950s and 1960s: *Daring Hearts*, as well as an archive collection, some of which is now in The Keep (South East Archives). Linked to this was the *Queer About Campus* exhibition (2001) which drew on oral histories to create exhibitions and events on campus and in the city. We also draw on the interviews from *'Fifty Voices, Fifty Faces: The University of Sussex Oral*

History', commissioned to mark the institution at 50, as well as a range of primary archival material.

This paper attempts to construct an account of the Society, in the context of its political and social proximity to Brighton, UK. Both Brighton and the University are perceived as inclusive and liberal strongholds. Established in the 1960s, the University was created during a time of profound political and social change, including the most radical expansion of higher education in its history (Burkett, 2018a). The history of the University, its perception of itself as a radical 1960's institution and its location near Brighton are essential contributing factors to the overall narrative, history and character of the Society.

The interviews relate to five decades of student experience and capture recollections of the Society and its impact. Across the interviews there emerged a number of broad themes: Queer politics and beyond, identity exploration and creation, town and gown. The article is arranged around these themes, rather than chronologically. Each is considered separately but there are obvious overlaps. An historical timeline of the Society is included in the Appendix 1, and the following section outlines the context and background to this research.

Literature review and context

This paper makes a significant contribution by bringing together LGBTQ+ histories and student politics and societies. There is a rich literature on student societies that deploys social movements (Crossley, 2008), network analysis and concepts of affinity and collective action (Aitchison, 2011; Crossley and Ibrahim, 2012; Hensby, 2014; Loader et al., 2015) and puts this in an international and historical context (Solomon and Palmieri, 2011). Accounts of the political economy of Higher Education such as Power's (2012) account of the production of students as 'Dangerous Subjects' are also important in examining the changing politics of student protest. There is an extensive set of literatures around 20th century LGBTQ+ histories including civil rights, liberation movements (Robinson, 2006), activism and AIDS (Gamson, 2018), memory studies, oral and collaborative history, and storytelling which is too far reaching to account for here (Plummer, 1994). However, there are very few areas of the literature which examine LGBTQ+ student societies specifically, despite their powerful capacity. Where there are strong connections is with political and contemporary histories that bring together LGBTQ+ history and the UK left (Leeworthy, 2016; Robinson, 2006, 2007), and we draw on some of this work in the following discussion. There are equally strong connections with work on women, feminism and student experience (Evans, 2016; Gmelch, 1998), and the importance of gendered erasures on the one hand and of the strength of intersectional politics on the other, and this is also reflected in the following.

Universities are important spaces for political socialization (...). Students are 'freed' from the influence of parental or family ties to explore their political beliefs; large

numbers of students mean there is a critical mass of activists to mix with; Universities offer students the time and opportunity to join societies that facilitate the creative development and performance of the political self. (Evans, 2016)

This development of the political self can be seen in terms of engagement with LGBTQ+ societies, their critical mass, fragmentation and change. In this sense it is not surprising that the Society's history is fragmented and contradictory. Since its foundation as GaySoc, there has always been a group but it has changed name and proliferated or existed as a coalition of interests rather than a cohesive group at times. The interviews reveal significant points of departure or cohesion within the groups: the 1970s Gay Soc. [+ Sussex Gay Liberation Front], the 1980s Lesbian-GaySoc, the early 1990s GLB Society, the late 1990s–2007 LGBT, 2008–LGBTQ+. Other affiliated groups include Bi-Choice; Queer Soc; and Queory, a student led seminar group connected to the Centre for Sexual Dissidence and Cultural Change. This centre was established in the 1990s by Alan Sinfield and became internationally influential in the field.

Of GaySoc, there are multiple accounts of its foundation. According to the current group it was founded in the late 1960s (Sussex LGBTQ+ Society, 2018). However, there are at least two other accounts: DB (undergraduate 1968–71) states 'there was a gay society started [in 1970, 71], which I didn't join just through fear really' (DB, 2017), while JS (undergraduate 1977–81) states 'GaySoc was started sometime after 1971, [and was] supported by 3 members of staff' (JS, 2010). This periodisation is compatible with evidence that describes the foundation of the Sussex Gay Liberation Front (SGLF), for which the University was central; 'Sussex "Gay Libs" was started by Sussex University students in the winter of 70/71' ('Just a little different', 1972). By the mid-1980s, GaySoc 'transformed into the new Lesbian-GaySoc with the aim of encouraging participation by women and men alike' (Unionews, 1986a). The Society announced it was 'for anyone who wishes to join together in an informative, social and supportive group to work towards equality for all lesbians, gay men and bi-sexual people' (Unionews, 1986b). By the early 1990s the Society incorporated bisexuality, although not without some tensions. This brief history can be viewed as an observation of wider contemporary queer communities and their politics. Debates over the name, and the inclusion of B (bisexual) in the early 1990s and T (transsexual and transgender) in the late 1990s, are representative of wider queer identity politics, and are explored in later sections.

Queer politics and beyond

I knew that a lot of the early generation of gay politics had started at universities and that people who were students were among the most prominent activists in the movement. (AM, 2017)

From its inception the Society was linked to political activism, reform and liberation, and is reflective of dynamic student politics. Sussex is associated with activism, and historically there have been a broad range of political activities on campus. These include anti-fascism, anti-racism, anti-apartheid, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, education cuts, gay rights and women's liberation, for example. Members of the LGBTQ+ societies were continuously engaged in political activity linked to gay liberation but also to broader liberation movements, gender issues and debates. Levels of political engagement and commitment differ according to each account, but the interviews reveal key moments of rupture and shifts. For example, as the gay liberation movement gained momentum in the 1970s, women's liberation became an alternative site of activity for many lesbians who felt marginalised. Conversely, moments of coalescence occur around particular gay liberation campaigns (e.g. Section 28, AIDS, marriage equality), as well as broad protest movements (e.g. students fees and the Iraq wars).

While the late 1960s is seen as pivotal for gay rights, DB describes this time as 'early days in the movement', and a time when the scene, 'was pretty hidden' and there was little in the way of gay activism or visibility of a gay community on campus (DB, 2017). DB's contemporary, KK, describes this period as 'pre-gay Sussex', demonstrating perhaps, the power of myth in respect to the narrative of the University and Brighton as tolerant. KK (2017) provides detail on the complexities of this time:

When I came to Britain [from America] I retained my leftist sentiments, which went along with my lover's views. We marched at least twice in London, once in a labor-strike demonstration and also in an anti-American demonstration against the War. My immediate circle of friends and acquaintances were socially conscious, a few actually identifying as Communist. Yet there were no apparent gay men.... Most identifiably homosexual men seemed rather apolitical, even leaning right and toward the upper classes.

The founding of the SGLF in winter of 1970/1971 was a turning point for GaySoc and gay politics on campus as they became involved with overt acts of protest: 'they organised the first gay demonstration in Brighton in October 1972 and the first Brighton Gay Pride march in July 1973' (Brighton Ourstory, 2001). In October of the same year a 'Come-together' event was organised in Brighton by GaySoc and SGLF 'to communicate love, information and inspiration' ('Gay Liberation Front, Come-together', 1973). The Student newspaper also documents the Society's attendance at a large gay rights demonstration in London (December 1975) and a series of protests against British Home Stores (BHS) in 1976. Coordinated by CHE the protests outside BHS were triggered when Tony Whitehead, a BHS employee, was forced to resign after he appeared in a programme, 'Coming Out', 'in which he was seen kissing his boyfriend' at Brighton's main train station (Brighton Ourstory, 2005). The protests highlighted homophobic discrimination in the workplace but became a focus of national

protest for gay rights and other civil rights activists, something that, as Whitehead recalls, had never happened before (Fanshawe, 2017). In this respect, GaySoc was part of a network of local and national gay liberation movements. GaySoc, Brighton CHE and SGLF were a catalyst for national gay rights campaigns and activities:

‘Simon Fanshawe, David Secret, Brian Robinson...these people are coming in during the mid-to-late 70s...they’re heavily involved in the campaigns around, Campaign for Homosexual Equality...the defence of gay news...[they had]...a liberationist view of politics’ (HW, 2017).

GaySoc, for some, became a point of access to broader civil rights activism and politicisation. Meetings included talks or presentations by speakers ‘doing research into matters that were relevant’ (AM, 2017). Their posters and flyers illustrate both the sociable and political aspect of the group, advertising gay discos while questioning legislation (i.e. Sexual Offences Act 1967) and discrimination:

“‘Why campaign for gay rights?’” Begs the question of how gay people are discriminated against – legally, economically, psychologically and ideologically. What are the reasons behind so many gay women and men being too frightened to “come out”?” (Why Campaign for Gay Rights?, 1976).

In 1979 GaySoc held ‘Gay Pride Week’, marking the 10-year anniversary of the Stonewall riot in New York. Significantly, this was part of a wider, regional campaign, ‘National Gay Pride Week’, organised by Surrey, Kent and Sussex Universities (Unionews, 1979). The event included coordinated campus events such as ‘Blue Jeans Day’ – ‘everyone wearing blue jeans on Thursday is assumed to be gay’ (Unionews, 1979). While these events, demonstrations and protests created a visible gay community on campus, homophobia and acts of intolerance existed. This is exemplified by a ‘Gay Rights at Work’ leaflet which states ‘in the face of anti-gay posters appearing on campus it is even more important to raise the issues of gay rights’ (Gay Rights at Work, circa 1982).

GaySoc provided its members, and the wider community, important methods to challenge prevailing discrimination and injustices. However, it was not without its own internal struggles and tensions. The late 1970s and early 1980s represent a fractious period in the history of the Society, sparked by gender politics. AM (2017) states ‘there was always tension between the minority of women who were involved and the majority of men’. Some of this tension can be attributed to the way in which individuals’ construct identity by association and affiliation. Of this, AM (2017) notes that ‘some women who identified as lesbian preferred to go to women’s groups, or women’s liberation groups’. This shift towards women’s liberation is reflective of broader lesbian politics at the time. By 1973 at least, there

were a number of women's liberation groups active at the University. Some of these advocated for women only spaces and meetings on campus:

The women's group is autonomous...after a vote taken at a Union meeting we have the right to meet as women only without losing any of our funds...we realised that it is personally necessary for women to be able to meet on our own to gain confidence but also politically necessary because it is only we who can lead the fight for our liberation. (Women's Liberation Group, 1978)

The group also state that they 'work with other groups and appreciate a bit of support'. Although in some ways radical and separatist, the point is that a proportion of women in GaySoc sought alliances within the Women's Liberation Group. HW (undergraduate 1980–83, member of GaySoc 1980–83) states: '...one of the dominant forces was feminism – so as a group of gay men, even though there weren't women in the group and the women chose to organise separately, we had to take account of that'.

GaySoc became Lesbian-GaySoc in 1985. In the intervening years it is not clear whether there existed a separate lesbian group at the University, but there was a Lesbian Group in Brighton which included students who met at the Dorset Arms, and was active from the early 1980s, if not prior ('Gay Pride Week: Coming Out?', circa 1982). Anon A states that GaySoc was 'pretty dominated by men' and recalls that she joined 'the Lesbian group', which was based around 'a wonderful lesbian community in Brighton'. Asked if the 'community was based around the university or the town', she explains that 'lots of women had been at the university, but they were living in the community, in women's houses' and states we were all 'lesbian, feminists' (Anon A, 2017). For her, there 'wasn't a lesbian and gay community', her recollection of GaySoc is not overly positive but her experience demonstrates the complex nature of identity politics. HW describes the lesbian group as 'magnificent' and states that it led the 'campaign against the selling of pornography on campus' and 'led...a critical assault' on the Pedophile Information Exchange. HW (2017) also states of a key member that she was: 'largely informed by being a mother, and a feminist, and the notions of consent...which were very influential in changing the kind of attitudes within the group around changing from a 70s liberationist one, to...perhaps focused on gender politics'.

They also describe the type of activities organised by the Society, which included, 'a lot of politics...film screenings...lots of discussion, and...lots of consciousness-raising, [and] theory-reading groups'.

The 1980s ushered a new phase for the Society and for gay liberation. The AIDS epidemic coupled with the introduction of draconian legislation known as Section 28, a Conservative law which banned the 'promotion' of homosexuality by local authorities and schools in the UK, compelled many to action. The Society coalesced around these issues for the next two decades. The Society was very active in

attending protests in Brighton and London. On campus protests included Kiss-Ins, demonstrations, vigils and a boycott of the number 28 bus route in Brighton, during the repeal debates, as described by Anon D (member of LGBT Society 2002–6). The age of consent was also highlighted as an issue during the 1980s and 1990s which reflected parliamentary debates at the time (Epstein et al., 2000). MT (2017) articulates this problem as follows:

[if] you add together the impact of the AIDS epidemic and the fact that it was illegal for men under the age of 21 to have sex, you've got a potential disaster because you have young men who were too scared to go to the doctor or to talk to someone about getting condoms for example. So, the LGB group had a fantastic opportunity to help people in really practical ways.

Involvement in broader student politics of the time was exemplified by the 'Faggots Fighting Fees' campaign in 1998. Later protests, in 2000s, included a 'fake wedding' to highlight civil marriage/partnership discrimination (Anon D, 2017).

The cumulative effect of this across campus was, as DG (undergraduate and member of the LGBT Society 2003–7) describes 'a strong culture of protest... of resistance, of speaking out' (DG, 2017). DG refers to a 'liberation network of groups' in the early 2000s that included the LGBT Society, the Afro-Caribbean and Asian Society, and the Women's Society. This network was connected through events such as 'revolutionary speakers for radical Thursdays' in which speakers addressed key issues. According to DG, these groups were also connected through poetry nights, club nights as well as free parties in the woodlands around the University. Additionally, DG recounts connections and involvement with groups in Brighton, including the radical social centre the Cowley Club, Radical Faeries and the Rebel Alliance.

While DG and other respondents describe a politically active environment, for many, the Society's main function was social. Anon D (2017), DG's contemporary, describes how new members used the Society as a social network rather than a political one, noting how this made longer term activity more political:

... a lot of people joined, to meet people for flirty reasons and once they worked out they could go down to Brighton and go to Revenge [nightclub] and stuff... they wouldn't turn up so much... so we ended up with the more politically minded group.

The ebb and flow of university life inevitably means that student societies are in a state of transition. New members bring new life and new political agendas which allow for a constant re-evaluation of the group's politics.

Identity exploration and creation

Issues around identity can be examined through three themes that emerge from the material: left affiliations (marked by fights with fascism) (1979); identity debates

around Bisexuality, Queer and Trans (1990s); and controversies about the use of terms faggot and dyke (1999 and 2013).

GaySoc and the SGLF, respectively, were important linguistic markers for liberation politics. As KK (undergraduate 1968–70) notes:

In 1970... The Boys in the Band played at The Theatre Royal Brighton (...) there was a sense of cultural identity in the art we followed that bolstered our identities... [but]by the time we saw Boys in the Band, we had changed from queer to gay..., although much of the surrounding culture had not. (KK, 2017)

This signalled a shift from the abject and illegal associations of the word queer, into the register of gay, associated with civil rights and liberation politics. The Society shifted through various iterations, alighting on LGBTQ+ as the current name. These signalled moments of alliance and rupture with women’s liberation and women’s groups, in the 1970s and the 1980s, as well as changing alignments in queer politics more broadly. In the 1980s there were moments of gender segregation – HW (undergraduate 1980–83, member of GaySoc 1980–83) describes the Society as for men although it had a ‘distant, but not unfriendly relationship with the lesbian group’ (HW, 2017). There are moments at which queer is seen as a negative term (1970s), or too political or colloquial (1990s), as people negotiate its changing associations. Trans was first added to the Society name in 2003, this has remained although the original inclusion of two letters (LGBTT), for both transsexual and transgender, has been dropped.

The negotiation of the group as anti-fascist, left leaning and anti-racist was marked by an encounter with far-right demonstration in 1979. This aligned the group with left-wing politics and alliances which were also reflective of the period (Burkett, 2018b; Robinson, 2007). In 1979 the Society’s screening of the *Word is Out (USA)* was attacked by a right-wing fascist group. This was covered in the local paper *The Argus* unsympathetically. The Student Union wrote to the paper and the coverage, editorial and response were published. AM (undergraduate 1977–80, GaySoc member 1978–80) recounts this incident:

during the film there... was a noise at the back of the hall... members of the National Front [had broken in]... they started beating people up... The Evening Argus printed an editorial about it which... didn’t exactly support the fascists... [but] didn’t condemn them either. It said something along the lines of this proves that people have strong feelings (laughs). Not surprisingly that editorial comment didn’t go down very well, and so GaySoc organised a protest and a picket. (AM, 2017)

This event fuelled the perception that homophobia was normalised and condoned by the then Conservative government, that gay rights were part of a left-wing politics and that the local paper was homophobic. The event also demonstrated the politicisation of being out, which was conflated with oppositional protest.

Bisexuality featured in relation to discussions about whether it should be included in the name of the group. As Claire Hemmings' (2002) work illustrates, there is a contentious history of bisexual spaces within lesbian and feminist community. Tropes of instability, transition and distrust have animated many representations of bisexuality. Anon A (undergraduate, 1978–81) reflects this sense of distrust in their interview: 'There were some bisexual women but of course I would have nothing to do with them' (Anon A, 2017). MT (LGB Society member 1992–95) states that when she joined:

It had only just become LGB and there was still a lot of debate about the B., it was one of the big topics of the time... I was Chair of the Society... 1993/4 and during that time set up a group, with another member, called Bi-Choice..., which was a Bisexual support group, I suppose a pressure group within the Society. (MT, 2017)

She also mentions that a lot of students at the time were 'studying queer politics, and some people doing the [Sex Diss] MA... were quite involved in leading some of the discussions which were quite academic'. MT notes 'usually there was a topic for discussion quite often it was things like should bisexuals be included in LGB, things like queer politics'.

By the early 2000s discussions about trans emerged more clearly. The term queer was in use, and signalled alliances with trans, but was also seen as too political or colloquial. Trans on the other hand was seen as important in terms of inclusion but there was also confusion about the term (Stone, 2009). Anon B (undergraduate 1997–2000) reflects on this: 'It was clear the term was transgender but for a while we changed to LGBTT because we... thought we should add another trans term to it... until we realised that it made no sense' (Anon B, 2017). On further reflection he thought that there weren't trans members but they were doing what they could to be inclusive, with limited knowledge.

The terms faggot and dyke were also contested at different points, and continue to be flashpoints. In 1998 student fees were first introduced in the UK, generating political protest. Anon B recalls their participation in a group allied 'Faggots Fighting Fees', which had the best banners and he remarks on how much attention these garnered and how much time and effort went into making them. In a police round up of protestors, when placards and banners were confiscated, they managed to salvage the banners (by just giving over the sticks). However, the use of the term faggots was seen as controversial. The group's website (1999) reports that the Socialist Workers Student Society referred to the use of the word as 'playing into the hands of the aggressor' and the NUS Free Education group referred to the placards as 'postmodern bollocks' (Faggots Fighting Fees, 1999). Anon B describes it as a beautifully alliterative and catchy slogan. The website (1999) also refers to a motion at the NUS LGB conference to vote against fees during which a member tried to remove the word faggots because it was offensive. The resonance of this term and its renewed potency were also reflected when a group

with the placard 'These Faggots Fight Fascists' were charged with using hate speech at the 2017 Glasgow Pride (Scottish Socialist Party, 2017).

Another dispute occurred in 2013 around the word dyke. Two local lesbian artists – Rose Collis and VG Lee – promoted their Christmas show 'Bah Humbuggers (or Dyke the Halls)' on the Society's Facebook page. This was removed and the Chair wrote to Collis and Lee to inform them the word dyke violated their safe space policy (Ledward, 2013). Collis and Lee mobilised around this and enlisted support from local media and arts figures. Media coverage extended across blogs and national press and was picked up by *The Huffington Post* (Sherrif, 2013). This coverage shared disapproval of the removal of the post and this extended across numerous channels including: The Argus (Brighton), GScene (Brighton), Pink News (London), Gender Identity Watch (USA) and Perfect Distractions (Brighton).

An interviewee, who joined the Society a couple of years after this incident, reflected on questions about media coverage:

...it was something to do with a group feeling that we censored their freedom of speech because their posts on the page containing words like "dyke" were removed. I only knew because we had a similar problem and the older committee members were wary of what happened last time. (Anon C, 2017)

The word dyke has special resonance because one of the main roads into Brighton is called Dyke Road. Although this is named after the local feature in which dyke means dam or ditch, lesbian and queer women's groups have found an affinity with the name. In 1977 the Devil's Dykes were a local punk band described as 'an all-women, and nearly all-lesbian band' (Brighton Ourstory, 2001). Anon A refers to this area as a place where women's houses and activist groups coalesced: 'lots of women moved out of a particular house they were using and they moved to Dyke Road. We all thought it was terribly funny, the dykes on Dyke Road' (Anon A, 2017). As of 2017 there is a contemporary feminist performance collective called the Devil's Dyke Network (see www.devilsdykenetwork.org for more).

Place: Town and gown

...we were part of the town, Brighton is very much...[part] of my story...[and] Sussex was this amazing environment, in which we could really test the limits of our visibility, and our unformed identity. (HW, 2017)

Respondents emphasised liberal and progressive associations with both the University and Brighton, and this is often cited as a significant factor in their interest in the University. Respondents describe a symbiotic relationship between the city and campus, between town and gown. As Robinson and Warne (2013) note 'Sussex has an image as the archetypal sixties university, by design, by curriculum and by folkloric student lifestyles' (157). Brighton then is also imagined as a gay 'Mecca' or 'a city

paved with “Gay Gold”, and known for its liberal politics and ethos of openness and acceptance (Browne and Baksi, 2013: 45). Both sites, in many ways, have gained mythical status in terms of radical politics, sexual freedom and exploration. This is entwined in the narratives of many of our respondents, some seek it out by attending Sussex, some find it while at Sussex, others never find it at all.

Interviews related to late 1960s, early 1970s, are indicative of a time before, or indeed on the cusp of, gay liberation. They are notably different to later accounts which assert the University and Brighton as open, liberal spaces:

The scene at Sussex at this time [1968–70] was quite atomized. There were a few people who were noticeably “out”...who through dress, behavior, associations, etc., were identifiable as homosexual. For the most part, however, the scene at the University was tacit and underground. (KK, 2017)

Reminiscing of their experience during the late 1970s, JS (undergraduate 1977–81, member of GaySoc), in *‘Fifty Voices, Fifty Faces’*, project states:

As an 18-year-old I was closeted about my sexuality – life for a gay teenager in the 1970s was not always easy. Bullying at school of boys or girls who didn’t conform to sexual/sexuality ‘norms’ was rife and homophobia in the ‘70’s was the rule rather than the exception. Coming to Sussex was a breath of fresh air, with the liberal political and social traditions of the University creating a far more relaxed attitude to sexuality than existed elsewhere in society. (Stanford, 2010)

This narrative is repeated throughout the testimonies. However, accounts of anti-gay posters across campus during the early 1980s and publications which describe the pressure ‘to conform to the heterosexual ‘norm’ puncture the myth of Sussex as a “‘swinging sixties” “anything goes” sort of college’ (*‘Gay Rights at Work’*, circa 1982). Unionews (1986a) states, ‘Sussex University may have the reputation of being a liberal [institution]... but in reality... it still harbours the same kinds of homophobic prejudices as we face in the “outside world”’.

These experiences are in contrast to the left-leaning, progressive, liberal ideology imagined. Alongside a sense of Brighton as liberal there are also accounts of fascist violence, homophobia, a local hostile press and violence on the streets.

However, in many respects this imagined sense of place creates the potential for real opportunity and scope for individuals to explore and develop their identity. As Browne and Baksi (2013) assert in *Ordinary in Brighton*, ‘... the imaginings, myths and representations of places, while supposedly fluid and ethereal, have real effects in the mundane aspects of daily life’ (45). DB (student 1968–71) describes his time at Sussex as ‘wonderful... the University and Brighton itself was such a contrast to the life I had known... I had a wonderful time’ (DB, 2017). DB’s encounters of the mundane, every day, however, were not always experienced as ‘wonderful’, he describes the existence of ‘casual homophobia but nothing very

active'. DB states he 'wasn't particularly out ... [and] ... it certainly wasn't easy in those days'.

When asked how their time at Sussex impacted their life afterwards, Anon A (2017), responded 'quite significantly':

it completely changed my life... it certainly brought the politics of thinking about compulsory heterosexuality, some of the critique that I developed about sexuality, around gender, I did because I went to "that" university. It could have been, that another university... it would be a different type of politics.

She also describes how Brighton provided alternative ways of living, both during and after attending Sussex; 'lots of women had been at the University but they were living in the community in women's houses, we were all lesbian, feminists...' (Anon A, 2017).

ND (LGBT Society member 2002–5) describes how 'urban legends' of 'drum circles and a lesbian cafe on the Rotunda at Falmer House' were passed down to new leaders and that beyond campus, 'Sussex University always had a reputation for being really strong in the LGBT front, like when we turned up to National NUS conferences, the respect we got from other universities just from being Sussex was pretty cool' (ND, 2017).

ND states that the reason he 'went to Sussex [was] because it's in Brighton', and he 'wanted to escape [his] hometown, so [he] ended up down in Sussex... doing the LGBT thing'.

'The LGBT thing' for a time also meant cooperation between groups at the two Universities in Brighton, the University of Sussex and the old polytechnic, University of Brighton. Anon D describes how they pooled funds and shared fundraising activities to have a joint float at Pride. Other initiatives linking the institutions included UniSex, which was especially prominent at Pride and other events. Designing the float and costumes, planning and fundraising were labour intensive activities that produced a very visible and strong contribution to Brighton Pride. However, when Anon D graduated this project evaporated almost immediately. They also recount going to Brighton Pride the following year and not seeing any visible presence from Sussex or Brighton University. The relationship between Brighton Pride and the University is marked in many years by absence as well as poignant engagement.

Although rupture and restarts are significant there are also strong threads of continuity and nostalgia. A recurring image is 'the room'. Multiple interviews reflect on the LGBTQ+ room in the students' union building. References to images on the walls, and objects, specifically the pink cupboard or closet, recur. The pink closet was used as an activist theatre prop to represent coming out. It featured in events in Library Square, which also comes up repeatedly as a centre of activity. The rhythm of student life is such that students come to the University to leave, and when they move on there are disconnections and losses as well as handover and memorialisation. However, people connect to their past through objects like the pink closet and

the LGBTQ+ room. Indeed, they connected particularly to the room itself and the fact of its existence was a powerful presence in these narratives.

In 2001 the *Queer About Campus* exhibition sought to develop a sense of continuity and queer history in relation to place, and brought together the two universities through a celebration of UniSex, a joint sexual health service. The event was described in the Bulletin (2001) as follows:

A homosexual history of Sussex is told in *Queer About Campus*, an exhibition opening tomorrow (10 February) in the Debating Chamber, Falmer House.

The centrepiece of the exhibition, 18 months in the making, is a campus bed with stories around it of the fun that many students have had in halls of residence. Listening posts, display boards, banners and photos – including this one of a campus kiss-in some time during the mid 1990s – celebrate the history of lesbians and gay men at Sussex, from political activism to women's football and the naval cadets.

The project was a collaboration between the Society and Brighton Ourstory. It was exhibited on campus, reviewed in *G-Scene*, featured in Brighton Pride and exhibited in the Fishing Museum on the seafront. One account highlights the 'notorious narrow campus single bed' on which visitors could sit and listen to the 40 oral history interviews (Oral History, 2001).

In terms of place and space, digital media extends and augments the space of the campus, exposing internal negotiation and discussion to a broader community. The group's use of social media invokes it as a space in which the group's ground rules apply. While conflict and tensions around the LGBTQ+ room, society meetings and events are less visible, the lens of social media amplifies and intensifies flashpoints and frictions. At the same time, it is a more diffuse terrain with very mobile investments. Conversely, the meeting room, the campus, places in Brighton, and the material objects of protest and performance figure as durable, romantic, attached elements of identity, heritage and nostalgia.

What emerges then is not only the political effect of being on campus but also of living in Brighton among a particular community of individuals. This symbiotic relationship between the University and Brighton creates an additional temporality. Individuals move from the campus to town, both physically and emotionally (e.g. life changes, life events, graduation).

Conclusion: Rupture, identity, power

I think it is very important that Sussex has been hugely gay and queer for decades, so yeah it has a got a great queer history. (BB, 2017)

When this current project was commissioned, there was little sense of there being a history or archive of the Society. Resources that surfaced during the research included the long-standing relationship with Brighton Ourstory, Queer About Campus, Fifty Voices, the Queer in Brighton project, a history page for the society and even the existence of a part-time archivist. This points to issues about the precariousness of community knowledge and heritage, especially in a context which is both institutionalised and subject to continual change. Sometimes there are handovers and continuity and at other times there are ruptures where people leave and new people arrive with little sense of who was in those spaces before them. It takes time to refresh, renew and inhabit the past, and for a population immersed in the new and focused on a degree it makes sense that there would be constant disconnect and restarts. For example, two years after this project began, there was very little sense of its existence in the new student society formation, and part of the work of the project has been to look at strategies of engagement to try and give it back to the Society.

Rupture is a constitutive and structural element of student society politics. For example, there have been several moments when the Society has been perceived as a social group rather than a political one. In the late 1980s and early 1990s this perception discouraged some women from participating because they felt that the real political work was in and with women's groups. There have been at least two formations of a parallel society called Queer Soc to provide a space for political engagement. There are currently at least three different variations on campus including the LGBTQ+ Society, Drag Soc and Philosophy Students in Solidarity with Trans Students. Students involved in Sexual Dissidence research didn't necessarily orientate towards the main student group, because they constituted their own queer cohort. The organisation of the student led seminar series Queory, for example, provided another forum on campus, one that contributed to Sussex's reputation as inclusive and progressive.

Negotiations about the name of the group and controversies over language, such as the word dyke amplify a number of tensions. They raise questions about safe space, gender, governance, self-expression and history. The word dyke has been seen as both celebratory and offensive at different times. Like queer and faggot, it has been used as a term of abuse, rejected, reclaimed, celebrated and used with affection and defiance. It has a long history and is closely attached to butch lesbian identities which have, even within LGBTQ+ cultures, historically been erased and marginalised.

The research demonstrates the importance and power of student led societies which are inherently dynamic, but partly made possible through institutionalisation. Despite the concentration of localised radical politics, higher education has remained institutionally conservative. Like other union groups, the Society is dependent on the University for space leased to the union. The wider University, although pioneering in Queer Studies internationally, has been much slower to take up issues such as LGBTQ+ support as an employer. Issues of discrimination and bullying have played out on campus and there have been

repeated and ongoing issues around misogyny, homophobia and transphobia over the years. Trans inclusion remains highly contentious. Although the student union has pioneered equalities and the history of the Society demonstrates a political history that has shaped British and international LGBT politics, including founder members of Stonewall and Pride, the University as a whole has not. The different societies, over time, through informal pedagogy created local spaces of gay liberation which have enabled national transformation and international influence. The politics of queer on campus have huge capacity in terms of shaping the national and international landscape, and this suggests that further research is required to examine these issues in other university environments.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: Part of this research was supported by the University of Sussex 'Junior Research Associate' scheme, this supported two undergraduate researchers, Gracy Zhang Tong and Saskia Dolan-Parry, to carry out 8 weeks of research.

ORCID iD

Sharon Webb  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4148-7324>

References

- Aitchison G (2011) Reform, rupture or re-imagination: Understanding the purpose of an occupation. *Social Movement Studies* 10(4): 431–439.
- Brighton Ourstory Project (1992) *Daring Hearts: Lesbian and Gay Lives of 50s and 60s Brighton*. Brighton: QueenSpark Books.
- Browne K and Baksi L (2013) *Ordinary in Brighton?: LGBT, Activisms and the City*. London: Routledge.
- Burkett J (2018a) Introduction: Universities and students in twentieth century Britain and Ireland. In: Burkett J (ed) *Universities and Students in Twentieth Century Britain and Ireland*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1–12.
- Burkett J (2018b) Revolutionary vanguard or agent provocateur: Students and the far left on English university campuses, c. 1970–90. In: Smith E and Worley M (eds) *Waiting for the Revolution: The British Far Left from 1956*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 11–29.
- Crossley N (2008) Social networks and student activism: On the politicising effect of campus connections. *The Sociological Review* 56(1): 18–38.
- Crossley N and Ibrahim J (2012) Critical mass, social networks and collective action: Exploring student political worlds. *Sociology* 46(4): 596–612.

- Epstein D, Johnson R and Steinberg DL (2000) Twice told tales: Transformation, recuperation and emergence in the age of consent debates 1998. *Sexualities* 3(1): 5–30.
- Evans E (2016) Intersectionality as feminist praxis in the UK. *Women's Studies International Forum* 59: 67–75.
- Fanshawe S (2017) What was it like to come out as gay in 1976? BBC. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p059mzfz> (accessed 25 January 2019).
- Fifty Voices, Fifty Faces: The University of Sussex Oral History. Available at: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/fiftyyears/50voices50faces> (accessed 25 January 2019).
- Gamson J (2018) “The place that holds our stories”: The national AIDS memorial grove and flexible collective memory work. *Social Problems* 65(1): 33–50.
- Gmelch SB (1998) *Gender on Campus: Issues for College Women*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Hemmings C (2002) *Bisexual Spaces: A Geography of Sexuality and Gender*. London: Routledge.
- Hensby A (2014) Networks, counter-networks and political socialisation: Paths and barriers to high- cost/risk activism in the 2010/11 student protests against fees and cuts. *Contemporary Social Science* 9(1): 92–105.
- Ledward J (2013) Anger as Sussex University LGBTQ student group bans use of the word ‘Dyke’. *Gscene*. UK. Available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20131110211438/https://www.gscene.com/news/anger-as-lgbtq-student-group-censors-use-of-the-word-dyke/> (accessed 25 January 2019).
- Leeworthy D (2016) For our common cause: Sexuality and left politics in South Wales, 1967–1985. *Contemporary British History* 30(2): 260–280.
- Loader B, Vromen A, Xenos MA, et al. (2015) Campus politics, student societies and social media. *The Sociological Review* 63: 820–839.
- Oral History (2001) Editorial and letters. *Hidden Histories* 29(2): 8–20.
- Plummer K (1994) *Telling Sexual Stories: Power, Change and Social Worlds*. London: Routledge.
- Power N (2012) Dangerous subjects: UK students and the criminalization of protest. *South Atlantic Quarterly* 111(2): 412–420.
- Robinson L (2006) Three revolutionary years: The impact of the counter culture on the development of the gay liberation movement in Britain. *Cultural and Social History* 3(4): 445–471.
- Robinson L (2007) *Gay Men and the Left in Post-War Britain*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Robinson L and Warne C (2013) Investigating the sixties at a sixties institution: Teaching as historiography. *Historical Research* 87(235): 154–177.
- Scottish Socialist Party (2017) Activists arrested at Glasgow Pride. Available at: <https://scottishsocialistparty.org/activists-arrested-glasgow-pride/> (accessed 25 January 2019).
- Sherrif L (2013) Sussex University LGBTQ society bans the word ‘dyke’, complains about Lesbian Christmas Performance. *The Huffington Post*, UK. Available at: https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/11/13/sussex-university-lgbtq-society-bans-word-dyke_n_4266678.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer_us=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_cs=QdlwZnJ0Xil-77EN-6mOEw (accessed 25 January 2019).

- Stone A (2009) More than adding a T: American Lesbian and gay activists' attitudes towards transgender inclusion. *Sexualities* 12(3): 334–354.
- Sussex LGBTQ+ Society (2018) About. Available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20171214151658/http://sussexlgbtq.weebly.com/about.html> (accessed 16 November 2018).
- Sussexstudent.com (2017) LGBTQ+ History Month Event Listings | Sussex Students' Union. Available at: <https://www.sussexstudent.com/news/article/ussu/lgbtq-history-month-2017/> (accessed 16 November 2018).

Primary sources

- Brighton Ourstory (2001) A history of Lesbian & Gay Brighton: Chapter 3: Out of the closet, 1967–87. Available at: <http://www.brightonourstory.co.uk/brighton-s-history/a-history-of-lesbian-and-gay-brighton-chapter-3-out-of-the-closet-1967-87/> (accessed 25 January 2019).
- Brighton Ourstory (2005) Project Newsletter, Issue 18. Available at: <http://www.brightonourstory.co.uk/ourstory-newsletters/> (accessed 25 January 2019).
- Bulletin (2001) Queer on campus. Available at: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/internal/bulletin/downloads/2000-2009/2001/February/20010209.pdf> (accessed 1 April 2019).
- Devil's Dyke Network (2019) Available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20190115141442/http://devilsdykenetwork.org> (accessed 15 January 2019).
- Faggots Fighting Fees (1999) Why faggots. Available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/19991008161057/http://www.sussex.ac.uk:80/Units/USSU/lgbs/green1.html> (accessed 17 November 2018).
- 'Gay Liberation Front, Come-together, October 12–14 at Brighton' (1973) [Leaflet] The Keep, SxUOS1/5/6/1/9. Brighton.
- 'Gay Pride Week: Coming Out?' (deposited 1982). [Leaflet] The Keep, SxUOS1/5/6/1/9. Brighton.
- 'Gay Rights at Work' (deposited 1982). [Leaflet] The Keep, SxUOS1/5/6/1/9. Brighton.
- 'Just a little different', deposited in University of Sussex Library 24 October 1972 (1972). [Leaflet] The Keep, SxUOS1/5/6/1/9. Brighton.
- Soloman C and Palmieri T (2011) *Springtime: The New Student Rebellions*. London: Verso
- Stanford J (2010) *Fifty Voices, Fifty Faces: The University of Sussex Oral History*. SxUOS1/7/1/044. Brighton.
- Unionews (1979) 'Gay Pride Week'. [Newspaper] The Keep, SxUOS1/5/4/3/4. Brighton.
- Unionews (1986a) 'We're here – Join Us' [Newspaper] (3 March 1986) The Keep, SxUOS1/5/4/3/6. Brighton.
- Unionews (1986b) 'Lesbian-Gay Week, 10–14 March 1986, list of events' [Newspaper] The Keep, SxUOS1/5/4/3/6. Brighton.
- 'Why Campaign for Gay Rights?' (deposited 1976). [Leaflet] The Keep, SxUOS1/5/6/1/9. Brighton.
- 'Women's Liberation Group' (1978) [Leaflet] The Keep, SxUOS1/5/3/12/24. Brighton.

Kate O'Riordan is a Professor of Digital Culture at the University of Sussex and Head of School, Media, Film and Music. Kate came to Digital Media through work on the ethical and social aspects of computing in the 1990s. Their work on gender, sexuality and digital culture extends to social issues in web design and

development, personal media production, digital imaging in medicine, computer gaming, community, social and activist media. More recent work has engaged with issues about other emerging technologies including biotechnology, cloning, genomics and public engagement with science and technology. After working as a visiting lecturer at Brighton and the University of Middlesex in the 1990s Kate came to the University of Sussex in 2001. At Sussex Kate has worked in both Continuing Education and Media, Film and Music. Kate sometimes blog at Biodigital Lives, <https://biodigitallives.wordpress.com/>.

Sharon Webb is a Lecturer in Digital Humanities at the University of Sussex, History Department and a member of the Sussex Humanities Lab. Sharon is a historian of Irish associational culture and nationalism (18th and 19th century) and a digital humanities practitioner, with a background in requirements/user analysis, digital preservation, digital archiving, text encoding and data modelling. Sharon also has programming and coding experience and has contributed to the successful development of major national digital infrastructures. Sharon’s current research interests include community archives and identity, community archives and preservation, with a special interest in LGBTQ+ archives, social network analysis (method and theory), and research data management. See www.preservingcommunityarchives.co.uk for recent work on some of these topics.

Appendix I. Poster created by JRA students

RESEARCHING LGBTQ+ INTERGENERATIONAL HISTORIES: The History of the UoS LGBTQ+ Society

Researchers: Tong Zhang and Saskia Dolan-Parry

Project aims were to map and identify:

- A timeline of the society and its name/name changes
- Key members of the society over time
- Media coverage of the society over time
- Connections between the society and other organisations, as well as wider sociopolitical events.

Research methods included:

- Media analysis of:
Local and national newspapers
Student media and University communications
- Oral history interviews with a variety of previous members.

Results Timeline

1968-1971: Conflicting reports - Kenneth claims there was no gay society at Sussex at this point, but then-boyfriend David assures us that one formed around 1970/1971.

1973-1975: Society dissolves.

1979, 30th January: A screening of the film "Word Is Out", organised by GaySoc and the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (CHE), is interrupted by violence from members of the National Front. Later that week, GaySoc attends pickets of the Argus offices over their failure to condemn this violence.

1979-1980: The group gradually becomes more divided, until men and women organise completely separately.

1979-1981: Linda Bellos is involved with a "lesbian group" that may not have been an official society; it was very political, and well-connected to the wider Brighton lesbian community, notably via "women's houses" on Dyke Road.

1985: Women are once more involved in the society. David remembers a supportive and social GaySoc: "we had a strong attachment to each other [...] I remember a dance that GAYSOC put on and a kiss that I will never forget."



1988/1989: The "Lesbian and Gay Society" protest Section 28 in London.

Image source: Le Flakic, A. (1988/1989) Anti-Section 28 protest in London, photo, private collection.

1993-1995: Colin Bannon and Donato Esposito are members of the LGB Society, but not Bi-Choice. They would occasionally attend meetings and events like the popular Pub Crawl at the beginning of each year. Both highlight the importance role of the society in helping people come out and build social networks.

Image source: (1993-1995) "DYNAMITE BOOGALOO" [advertisement] May. Courtesy of Colin Bannon.



2002-2005: Nathan and Neil describe friendships between leaders of the LGBT Societies at Sussex and Brighton University leading to collaborative projects such as Student Pride and a joint float at the Brighton Pride Parade. Sussex-specific activities included "Away With The Fairies" weekends away, and a fake wedding in Library Square in protest of marriage inequality.

Early 2010s: The society changes its name from the LGBT society to the LGBTQ Society, and a separate discussion society called "Queer Soc" is formed.

2017: The LGBTQ+ Society is engaged in many activities: Lilith and other members trained sexual health volunteers in LGBTQ-specific issues earlier this year, and collaborations with Brighton University's LGBT+ Society have led to regular social events, a trip to Student Pride, and a Student Ball.

1973: "GaySoc" organises a conference with the Gay Liberation Front.

1975, October-November: Kate, Carmel and John set up "Gay Soc".

1976, February: GaySoc attends a series of CHE-organised protests against BHS, for their homophobic discrimination against employee Tony Whitehead.

Image source: 2005. "It started with a kiss", Brighton Oursory Newsletter, (Issue 18) Walter.



1980-1983: Huw recalls: a "not unfriendly, but distant relationship with the lesbian group"; a generational shift away from liberationist politics and towards a "bigger political project", with strong feminist influences; regular discos organised by the society, and an involvement with Brighton nightlife.

Late 1980s/Early 1990s: The society changes its name to the "LGB Society" (to some controversy), and an LGBT-specific room, used by the society for meetings, is set up in Falmer House

1992-1995: Misa is a member of the LGB Society and a founder of Bi-Choice, a bisexual subset of the society. She recalls campaigns regarding the AIDS crisis, repealing Section 28, and equalising the age of consent laws - via protests, such as the kiss-in depicted here, as well as various fundraising events, such as fashion shows and club nights.

Image source: 2001. "Queer About Campus", Sussex Bulletin, 9th February.



Late 1990s: The society changes its name to the "LGBT Society".



1997-2001: Benedict Brook and the LGBT Society collaborate with Brighton Oursory to create the "Queer about Campus" exhibition about historical LGBTQ+ life at Sussex. The society's name is temporarily changed to the "LGBTT society", but this second T is soon dropped.

2003-2007: Dan Glass recalls cooperation between the LGBT Society and other groups on campus, notably in organising events and protests such as the Tent State University.

October/November 2014: The society adds a "+" to its name, becoming the LGBTQ+ Society.

Early 2015: Queer Soc and the LGBTQ+ Society merge when they both elect the same chairperson. Today, Queer Soc exists as a weekly discussion held by the LGBTQ+ Society.